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SUBJECT: SERBIA: TADIC CLARIFIES COMMENTS ON PARTITION

Ref: A) BELGRADE 1020, B) 07 BELGRADE 1328

Summary

¶1. (SBU) In response to the media flurry over his recent comments on Kosovo partition, Serbian President Boris Tadic held a press conference on September 30 to clarify Serbia's stance on Kosovo. He did not rule out the idea of partition completely, but stressed that he was not proposing it and would only consider it if all other options failed. On September 30 and October 1 the Ambassador publicly stated that the United States was opposed to partition. Embassy has been reinforcing that message at all levels of the Serbian government. Meanwhile, despite the apparent desire of many of Tadic's advisors to put the cat back in the bag, politicians and political analysts are actively and openly debating the merits of partition. End Summary.

Tadic Says He is Not Proposing Partition

¶2. (U) Following the controversy triggered by his September 29 statement to RTS that he was prepared to consider partition of Kosovo as a last resort (Ref A), Serbian President Boris Tadic held a press conference on September 30 to clarify state policy on Kosovo. Tadic stated that the future status of Kosovo should be settled within the framework of essential autonomy, that he was not proposing partition as a solution, and that Serbia would never recognize Kosovo's independence. He added that "intellectuals in Serbia and abroad discuss the question of partition and this is one of the options that has been emphasized all these years in searching for a solution to Kosovo's future status. I can only think about this when all other possibilities have been exhausted, while the question if I would support this solution is today an altogether hypothetical matter."

Embassy Pushes Back

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador gave a statement to Fox Serbia on September 30 emphasizing that the United States does not accept the concept of partition of Kosovo. He reinforced that message during an October 1 press conference in the western Serbian town of Uzice. He also conveyed the same message privately to Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic and presidential advisor Srdjan Saper, both of whom insisted vehemently that the press had taken Tadic's September 29 statements to RTS out of context. They said that partition was not an option unless all else failed. The Ambassador underscored that it should not be an option even then.

Public Debate Raging

¶4. (U) Numerous Serbian politicians and analysts have commented on the question of partition. Serbian Radical Party whip Dragan Todorovic told the press that Tadic's statement on the possibility

of Kosovo partition of Kosovo demonstrated his [Tadic's] "true intentions." Cedomir Jovanovic, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), said that "the matter of dividing Kosovo means bringing back into political life topics that were present in Milosevic's Serbia and in Kostunica's Serbia, and topics that as a rule ended in debacles for the Serbian state," adding that his party had always been against the division of Kosovo. Former Foreign Minister Goran Svilanovic told the press that the idea of partition was "the only realistic solution and the only new idea, albeit somewhat premature;" he added that partition would require recognition of the Albanian part of Kosovo and the dropping of all claims. Dusan Janjic of the Forum of Ethnic Relations characterized the idea as a return to "the myths" of Dobrica Cosic (Yugoslav president 1992-1993, Ref B) and claimed Tadic's statement was evidence that he had no Kosovo strategy.

Comment

15. (SBU) Despite his advisors' attempts to downplay the significance of Tadic's comments to RTS, the fact is that Tadic did not rule out partition as an option in his September 30 "clarification." It therefore appears to be no accident that the Serbian president has chosen to add this new element to the domestic and international debate over Kosovo. Whether he has fully examined the potential negative impact on Serbia's ICJ resolution in the UNGA is another question; we imagine that the prospect of Serbia using an ICJ advisory opinion as grounds to challenge Kosovo's borders may deter some countries from supporting the ICJ referral resolution.
End Comment.

MUNTER